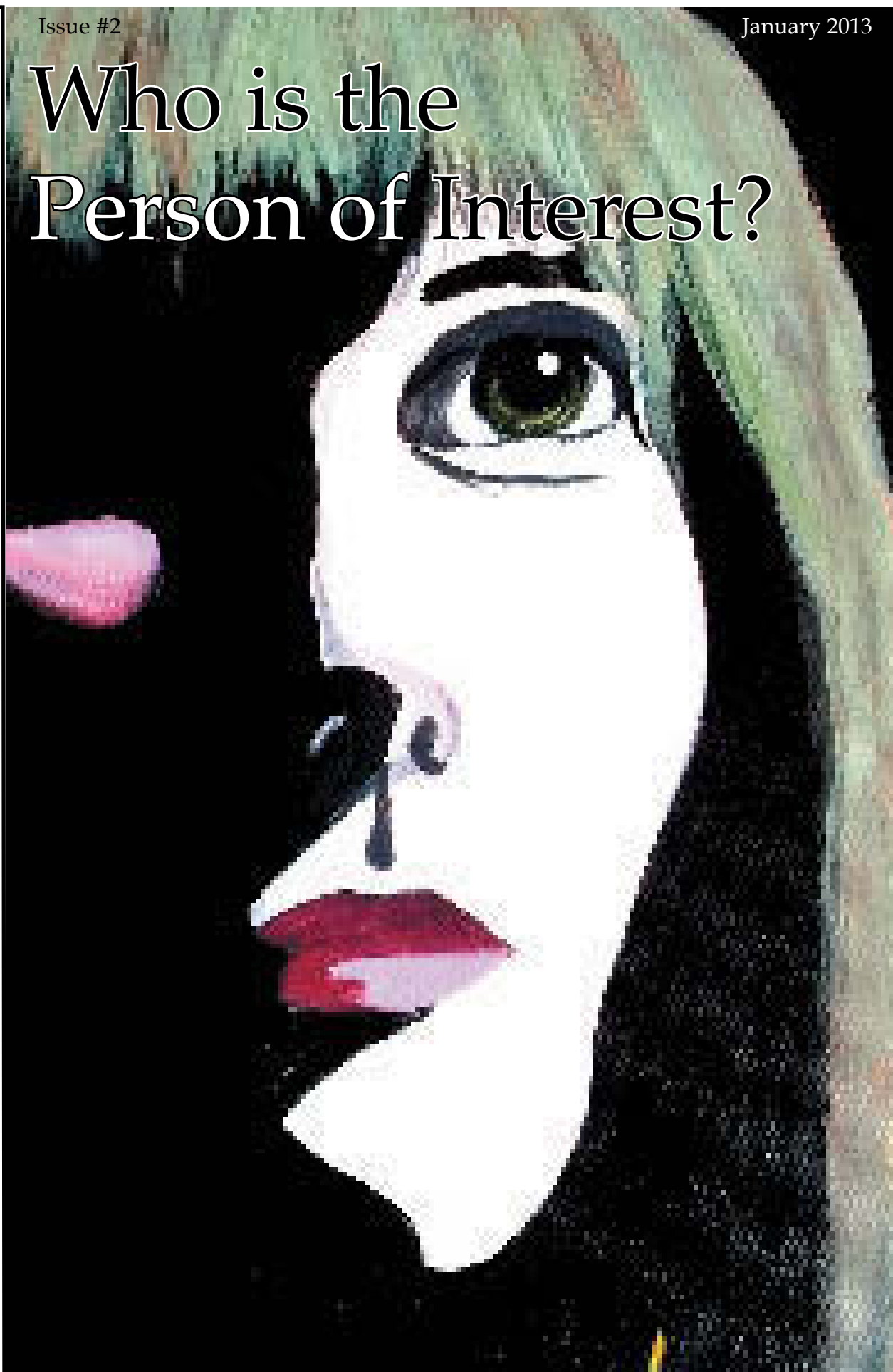


Who is the Person of Interest?



Phoenix

e-Newsletter

Issue #2

January 2013

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It's that time again, folks! The snow will be falling, the power will be outing, and of course, hearts shall be warmed by hot chocolate, layers of sweaters and open fires (safely contained, we hope).

As the holiday season begins, *Phoenix* would like to offer a bit of winter wisdom:

Make sure any boots you decide to wear have a considerable amount of traction to them. Your winter jacket should come with a detachable hood and a high enough collar to cover the neck. Knit gloves are ideal for snowball fights, but heavier gloves and mittens are suggested when cleaning off the car or shoveling the drive-way. Winter scarves should not be made out of silk, polyester or wool. Always make sure your pants are sufficiently pulled up to your waist when playing in the snow. Some areas of the body tend to go numb and we don't realize what clothing falls, and what clothing stays.

But most importantly: read "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens.



Logo by Shiyon Mathew

Thoughts on the Singer- Songwriter

Who is the singer-songwriter? To whom does he address his song? What language is to be expected of him? These are questions postulated by the listener, but only the singer-songwriter has the true answers. The singer-songwriter emerges from the human desire to communicate and express the self through music and lyrics. Granted, not all musicians are singer-songwriters. The singer-songwriter, or rather, the *ideal* singer-songwriter, is endowed with a lively awareness of the self, a specific comprehension of human nature, and a passion to contemplate and manifest the language of his universe.

Today's culture has been dampened with excess. Our society maintains overproduction. We choose immediacy over careful attention to detail. In this, we lose touch with language: the language that fuels our lives and connects us to the lives of others. There is no doubt in my mind the need to change these ways approaches us. Nonetheless, constant alterations to our social models reel us away from artistic depth in spite of many great advances.

The authentic mode of the singer-songwriter lies most visibly in the past. The past that resonates with me—the one that holds profound influence over my current music selection—is in the sounds of Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Janis Joplin, Freddie Mercury, and the like. What is it that has kept their songs alive for so long? It is the artist's ability to maintain a detail-oriented songwriting process in the face of overproduction, our growing disconnect with the language—it is the ability of the singer-songwriter to conjure up human passions and great pleasure using not only the right music, but just the right words.

In an interview with Dick Cavett, John Lennon states, "I suddenly realized...I should put all my energy into writing the song, into the lyric. So then I transferred any writing ability I had completely to the songs. And the song lyric got better and the structure of the words got better and they became as important as the tune..." (September, 1971). There is a synthesis that occurs in songwriting. This synthesis comes from an artist's environment: the internal perceptions and external influences. It comes from exposure to life. Like anything else, with experience comes selectivity and precision.

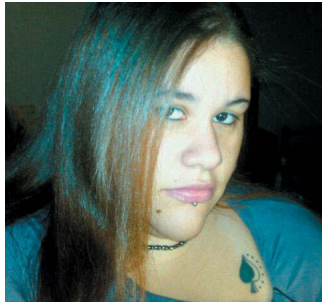
Language makes the artist. This language is that experience which comes from the individual: frustrations, love, and grace.

"The words are just as important as the music...there would be no music without the words."

-Bob Dylan, San Francisco Press Conference, December 1965

Genevieve Fleckenstein





Literary Lore and Legends

Elida “Elly” Acosta: What Made Me

Alyssa Capriglione

Elida “Elly” Acosta (SAS ‘14) is a Social Work major and Spanish minor. She is looking to give back to her community – Washington Heights, NY. – as a high school social worker and Spanish teacher. But while working to become fluent in Spanish, Elida also explores the beauty of the English language through her passion for writing. Alyssa Capriglione, Phoenix staff writer and editor, sat down with Elida recently to discuss the specifics of her passion.

AC. What is your favorite genre of writing?

EA. I love writing poetry. I love how the words flow and how it all sounds, how you can hear the emotion in a poet’s usage of commas and line breaks.

AC. How and when did you first start writing?

EA. I was ten or eleven when I started writing, as far as I can remember. After my mom passed away, people always suggested that I keep a journal of my feelings so I could let it all out. Once I learned about poetry, I just fell in love with it.

AC. How did writing help you cope with such a painful experience?

EA. I don’t know. I would write to my mother and about her, not just poetry, but anything. I would write her letters telling her I miss her and how I wish she would come back. It gave me an outlet to express myself, because after she passed I moved in with my grandparents and at the time I knew almost no Spanish and their English wasn’t all that great.

AC. Where does your inspiration come from?

EA. I write about my feelings most of the time. Love and anger are probably the two I use the most, because for me they tend to be the most intense emotions. I also write about how people make me feel; as long as something has a significant impact on my life, I can write about it.

AC. How has writing helped you during your

time at The College of New Rochelle?

EA. Writing keeps me sane [laughing]. It just helps me vent when I need to.

AC. But do you find that the act of writing helps you with your academics at all? Have you grown as a writer throughout your college experience?

EA. I write when my workload is a little too much and I need to clear my mind. I do think it has changed my ability to write overall. Poetry has helped my other writing flow. But being at CNR has affected my writing in general. Meeting people like Tazmin Uddin and Praniece Little changed my style and opened my eyes to spoken word. I had never paid much mind to it, but I’ve grown to love it. I’ve changed the way I deliver my message when I’m reading one of my own pieces. Even my topics have broadened. I used to only write about topics that affected me firsthand, but now I challenge myself to write about anything.

AC. Do you find that writing has helped you get through other difficulties you have faced throughout your life?

EA. Writing helps me through everything. The only other example I can think of right now was my first heartbreak. I know that sounds corny, but it’s true. Writing how I felt about her being with someone else kept me from crying about it.

AC. Lastly, what would you say is the most gratifying thing about writing? Do you think you will continue to write the rest of your life?

EA. I know I’ll be writing for the rest of my life. I love how I feel after writing a new piece of work. I feel even better when others enjoy my work. The most gratifying part to me is that it’s simply something I’m good at, and that writing is something no one can take from me. **Ω**

Momma's Girl

by Elida Acosta

As I sit in my bed, 5 AM reminiscing
On all the things I have come to lose in this life
I can't help but notice all it has helped me to gain
A sense of self and true reason for being.
Just the other day I found out that my mother tried for years to have another baby
girl
After sadly losing her two year old daughter.
And I am the product of all that trying.
I am the daughter my mother was trying to have
Even if some may say I am only here to replace that lost child.
I must continue to strive to reach my full potential
And make that woman proud of me even though she may not be here to witness it
firsthand.

I know there are days where I feel I'm simply not good enough,
Didn't keep myself out the hood enough
But it's all a bluff, a front,
And I groan and I moan on how I must face it alone but this is never true, for any of
us.

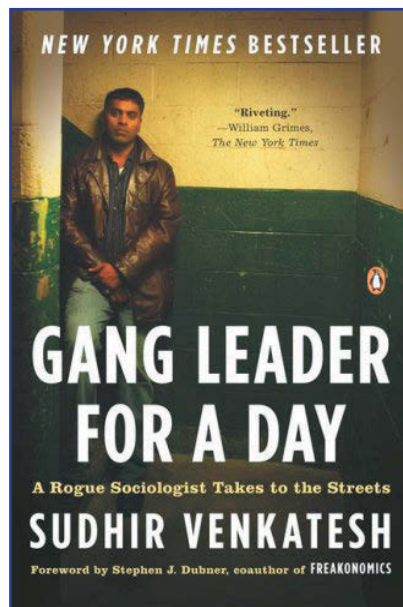
You're never alone if you have yourself to believe and confide in.
So when the times are meek and grim just reach within yourself
And bring out that power you try to hide and let it guide you,
Only 20 years old mind you but I've been through some things
That would make even the strongest of men break down and cry
And it'd be a lie if I said I haven't shed those
tears myself.

But what matters is I've persevered and held my head up high.
Nights I thought I would die for the mistakes of others,
Lost brothers, and lovers and teachers and preachers and fathers and mothers.
Watching lives fall apart at the seams and it seems that nothing can make it better,
Till I'm finally fed up with all of the bullshit and just try to push through it,
And now I'm at a point where I know I can do it.
If I've done it this long then no way, no how am I gonna stop now
Not when I feel that finish line so close approaching,
I just got to keep searching.

And as I sit on my bed at 5 o'clock in the morning I feel
Satisfied with myself and my ability to do just about anything,
And when it's all said and done with
I know I can and will be the daughter my mother always wanted
And then some.

Ω

Staff Picks



Gang Leader For A Day

by Sudhir Venkatesh

Sudhir Venkatesh's *New York Times* Bestseller *Gang Leader for a Day* is set in the South Side of Chicago's infamous Robert Taylor Homes. It is a dark world run by gold-toothed gang leaders with private security guards and flashy sports cars. Drug-addiction, poverty, and subpar living conditions run rampant; hustlers and prostitutes are next-door neighbors and people play by their own rules. In this world, stovetops are used to convert cocaine powder to crack, broken doors take more than a week to fix, and delinquent gangsters police the people. Basketball games and

barbecues are common. But so are drive-by shootings that claim the lives of people enjoying hot dogs on a summer afternoon. This was the world Venkatesh, a naïve graduate student from the University of Chicago, entered to study the underclass urban neighborhood.

"How does it feel to be black and poor?" was one of the first questions Venkatesh posed to a group of street gang members patrolling a run-down apartment. Venkatesh quickly learned, from the mouthful of profanity he received, that he was not going to get any data by hounding people with his surveys. He befriended J.T., a charismatic local Black Kings gang leader, who informed him that the only way Venkatesh was going to learn about the "black poor" was to observe the lives they lived. Gaining J.T.'s trust, he shadowed him for the next 8 years, learning and observing firsthand the inner workings of the Black Kings gang and life in the project.

Venkatesh finds out that the Black Kings gang was a highly organized group with a complex hierarchy of members from the top tier "board of directors" to the lowest "foot soldiers." Local leaders like J.T. were in charge of managing the members within their respective areas, maintaining financial records, overseeing the purchase and distribution of cocaine, and ensuring a stable customer base.

The book dispells common assumptions about gang membership and the criminal underworld. Being part of a gang entailed selling illegal drugs and making profit, but it also led to the peculiar symbiosis of gangsters and the civilian population of the projects. By policing neighborhoods, punishing domestic abusers, deploying members to patrol apartments

and mediating conflicts, gangs provided security and maintained peace. They donated money to youth centers and tenant leaders, and mandated gang members to receive their high school diplomas (though young recruits dropped out of high school to earn money by joining gangs).

"The drug economy is useful for the community," claimed J.T, as it "helps re-distribute drug money back to the community."

Because the drug leadership committed such iniquitous and reputable acts, the author continuously questioned his own morals. When J.T. violently punished a homeless dissident, Venkatesh watched not knowing whether he should break the fight, call the police, or be a passive observer. To be honest, there were many occasions I caught myself defending a gangster's illegal actions.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the book, is the ability to connect with "criminal" characters such as J.T, the college graduate who returned to the projects to operate a drug cartel. His character emerged as a ruthless, authoritarian figure in the eyes of the community, but there was also the flawed façade of a man desperately trying to hold onto a changing drug economy. He cared about family and relationships, and looked out for Venkatesh as if he was one of his own.

While I appreciated the author's desire to interact with the people in the community, there were times I questioned the researcher's involvement with his subjects. At times he took it a bit too far as a researcher. There was a point in the book when his subjects felt betrayed and angered after finding out Venkatesh disclosed their per

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sonal information to J.T.

Though the book is very much about the tragedy of people forced to rely on street gangs for daily survival, it's also about a community that comes together in times of adversity. At the very heart of it, the poor black residents of the Chicago South Side project, despite their environment, were no different. They were warm and friendly and carried the same ambition to prosper and lead a happy life.

Sudhir Venkatesh's gritty sociological narrative is an exclusive passport into the underground world of drug trade, notorious cartels, and a poor community living in one of the largest public housing developments in the country. **Ω**

Shiyon Mathew

Listener's Pick

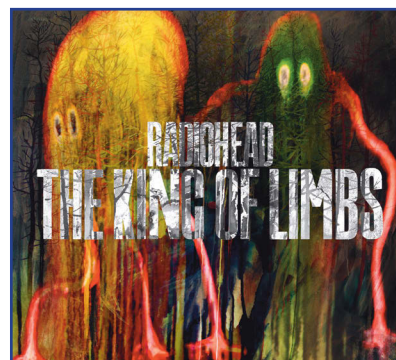
King of Limbs

Radiohead

iTunes Price: \$9.99

Rating: You never know if it fits until you try it on.

It's music you can't stop listening to once it starts. For musicians, the genius behind each song will drive you crazy wondering why you didn't write anything like this. For Radiohead fans, the new ambient direction will twist your horns. But for the avid music lover, this album will soothe your cynical soul.



Track Listing:

1. Bloom
2. Morning Mr. Magpie
3. Little By Little
4. Feral
5. Lotus Flower
6. Codex
7. Give Up the Ghost
8. Seperator

Writing Words of Wisdom

Tips and Hints from CNR's Master Tutor

Christopher DiBiase

As winter approaches, my imagination turns to thoughts of freshly fallen snow and the blank page it represents. Although winter brings chilly temperatures and poor road conditions, it also sets the scene for a fresh start and a new beginning. The blank page also offers the opportunity for a fresh start and new beginning. But how do we respond to the blank page? Do we feel a sense of excitement and wonder at what this page might become, or does the blank page leave us anxious and paralyzed, fearful that our words cannot live up to our expectations? For many students I work with, the latter is usually the case. For these students and many writers, writer's block often occurs before the writing has even begun. How do we then find the courage and strength to take those first crucial steps out into an open landscape and leave our

mark? What follows are two strategies for getting past writer's block.

ONE. Go back to the basics; leave the computer, laptop, tablet, and phone behind. Seeing a blank page on the screen can be more intimidating than working on paper. The harsh white light from the screen seems more appropriate for interrogation than exploration. It's very easy to type a few words and then delete it all because you feel it isn't good enough. Handwriting ideas can help you avoid this problem. You can still cross out an idea or sentence if it is lack-luster, but the page is no longer blank or pristine. You may as well continue writing.

TWO. Write something—anything—else. It is dif
continues on page 10.....



The Corpus Christi Carol

And the Preservation of Antiquated Texts

The Norton Anthology of English Literature Volume One—a massive book containing English literature’s canon—weighed down my backpack for all of Fall 2012, creating knots in my back due to its ungodly poundage sitting bound and bent in the pocket of my reliable tote. Within its 3,078 pages—not including table of contents, preface or appendix—lies Chaucer, Wyatt, Milton, Shakespeare et al. It is what I imagine the asteroid that wiped out the dinosaurs feels like if it were being carried in a backpack. I exaggerate, of course.

Literature, in the same sense that an asteroid was the final blow that brought the dinosaurs to extinction, has the tendency to be just as finalistic. Not simply in the way an author brings an end to a character or resolves the plot, but also when readers withhold interpretation

and reflection of subtext. This is why classroom situations are so important: if one simply read and kept interpretation of the text to oneself, the text would never travel past the lips of the reader—put this on a grand scale—eventually the book would become culturally obsolete. If one does not disclose information, interpretation, insight or revelation to one’s fellow peers, how is the book that inspired these emotions, feelings, or logic passed down through channels that will keep the book relevant? Literature’s finality can be avoided. One’s ideas, once spoken to a listening other, are passed along, are talked about outside of the classroom, and the English majors that hem and haw about lugging around a centuries-long Middle England parade, are in fact keeping these stories relevant (because complaints are the loudest and most convincing form of preservation).

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Occasionally, preservation takes the form of appropriation: when one makes an already existing thing his own. This is the case of "The Corpus Christi Carol." As I was bookmarking a reading assignment in the *Norton Anthology*—writings by Julian of Norwich—I came across "Corpus Christi" on the page before the Julian reading began. I had simultaneously been on a Jeff Buckley kick for the past month. Jeff Buckley, son of folk singer Tim Buckley, was a pop/rock artist who found fame in the early 1990s with his studio album *Grace*. In 1997, Buckley drowned in the Mississippi River: a tragic ending to a tragically beautiful singer-songwriter. I grew up on *Grace*, finding a comforting connection with the name of the album and myself—my middle name is Grace—feeding my musical inclination with his songs. On this album is a chilling interpretation of "The Corpus Christi Carol." The discovery of the lyrics in the *Anthology* sent a chill up my spine.

As I sat in the wooden kitchen chair researching the origins of the holy lyrics, it occurred to me that the song I listened to as a child was actually worth the worship I gave it. Written by Franciscan William Herebert in the 14th century, the carol is an allegory of the crucifixion of Christ. It is not the allegory that strikes me now, as I write this, nor the shock of coincidence, but rather the time stamp on the carol. It has been around since the 1300s, and found its way into the popular culture of 1994. Buckley, so great a music figure and loved by his fans—still being relevant today—brings with him the relevancy of "Corpus Christi" and will continue to keep it alive, though he is gone.

For texts like this one, for *Beowulf* that has been in circulation since the eighth century, to continue to live on in our society—so wrapped up in modern technology—means that the finality of literature is being avoided; that people like Jeff Buckley who bring antiquity into the present, that books like *Norton Anthology*, however strenuous, are keeping texts alive. We are the museum curators of our written history; we assemble the bones of the dinosaur and present them to the public. It is important as students and as professors that we never forget what built the foundation of writing today. If that means we continue to complain about the weight of *Norton Anthology*, then complain we must. Ω

Amelia Ellis

"Lully, lullay, lully, lullay
The faucon hath borne my make away.

He bare him up, he bare him down,
He bare him into an orchard brown.

In that orchard ther was an hall
That was hanged with purple and pall.

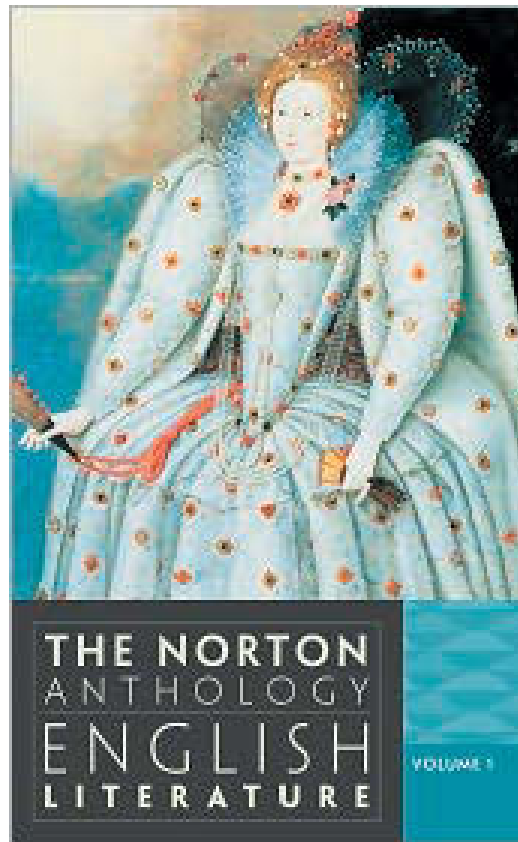
And in that hall ther was a bed:
It was hanged with gold so red.

And in that bed ther lith a knight,
His woundes bleeding by day and night.

By that beddes side ther kneeleth a may,
And she weepeth both night and day.

And by that beddes side ther standeth a
stoon

Corpus Christi written thereon."



Just Think About It: Sleeplessness

Regina Alvarado

One's first all-nighter in college is a coming-of-age moment. You procrastinated on writing your term paper or studying for a final, but it's okay. You still have eight hours in the night left to study, write fifteen pages, and get enough sleep before class in the morning. If sleep is considered a priority, that is. "Who needs sleep anyway? Sleep is for the weak," you tell yourself. Although cocky in the face of sleep, you are no match to the stress of homework that should have been completed weeks ago. Those eight hours begin to dwindle down, and not only are you losing hours, you are losing your mind. Many cups of coffee later, you find yourself staring out the window looking at the morning. How beautiful it would all seem if only you had the energy to appreciate such a — no! You're procrastinating again. No time to think about anything but finishing that paper; there are only two pages left. And then you finish. Time to face the day and wear your dark-circles with pride.

Sleeplessness. It's a numb sensation with many facets. There may be a wave of energy that comes to your aid — not your second wind, because that happened six hours ago — but more of an adrenaline flux mixed with the high levels of caffeine in your system. You are now running on back-up. Like a man whose body taps into the excess fat on his body when there is no food left to provide proper metabolic energy, the body is beginning to feed off of the perks a fully awake person may experience: cognition, reasoning, seriousness, happiess, joy, comfort, eloquence, and motor skills. But what happens after this rush of high energy? You crash. Your body feels immobilized, but everything moving in front of you seems to be going faster than you anticipated. You might find yourself staring off into space. If you're lucky, people might think you're in deep thought. The reality is, you're simply sleeping with your eyes open.

Your attitude changes. You're so possessed by depravity of sleep, that you forget your inhibitions. Your friend's breath reeks of Cool Ranch Doritos? You flat out tell her to find some gum. So

Sleep (n) 1: the natural periodical suspension of consciousness during which the powers of the body are restored.

the sandwich you're eating is soggy and cold from sitting in the cafeteria fridge the night before? Doesn't matter! Are you even hungry? Doesn't matter! You stuff your face to keep yourself from falling asleep. It's a sublime apathy toward everyday life. It's almost Zen. Zen, except for the part when your eyes begin to roll around in your head, and you have little control over the quaking eyelids about to slam shut at the first

sign of weakness.

Perhaps the most curious thing about experiencing these sleepless nights and the days that follow them, is that no matter how much you swear to never do it again, you repeat it. You get a list of assignments for class and you push them aside because let's face it, there's a Big Bang Theory marathon on T.V., Tumblr thrives, and Facebook exists. Who needs sleep anyway? Sleep is for the weak! Wait...déjà vu! Ω

*Writing Words of Wisdom
continued from page 7...*

difficult, on occasion, to start a new writing project when there is lack of momentum. Going from zero to a comfortable writing pace can be a struggle, especially if the writing task at hand is challenging, unfamiliar, or high-stakes. Low-stakes writing can help stretch those writing muscles, put your mind into a writing mode, and build-up your speed before diving into that new project. Work on a project that is already in progress. Write down how you feel about the project. Once you have found a comfortable writing rhythm, take another shot at the blank page.

Hopefully these strategies will help you push past your own bouts of writer's block. Stop staring at that snowy field; get out there and leave some footprints. Ω

The Legend of Jack and May

Chapter One Excerpt

by Amelia Ellis

The story begins like this:

Jack emerged from the shade of the easy-going willow tree as the sun withdrew its rays. The skin on his bare chest rippled as a gust of chilled wind ran over his shoulders and legs like a stampede of horses galloping through the plains. His belly tickled and settled from the hotness of the purest of pleasures: sex. He was a beast of confidence, joy; the mammalian need to dominate had been satisfied; his purpose as a man had been actualized. He had conquered the woman, he had reaped the treasures; he had partaken of the forbidden fruit. And behind him his conquered was splayed on the grass. She was golden, she was May.

Like a dove riding the air current, her arms lay out by her sides in an angelic rest. This was Jack's prize. This magnificent creature, formed from God's perfect clay, had slept with the king of the human race. May cooed after him from underneath the sweeping branches. Her lips formed sweet words Jack sipped up like nectar.

Her long, wavy, chestnut locks covered her porcelain skin reaching past the nape of her neck to the small of her back. Her brown eyes fluttered and shone in the half-twilight. She had been a virgin once. But as the instincts and modesty of a woman would now tell her, there was something shameful about the insemination. She lay wet, used, and unabashedly bare. May was unmarried but consummated, and her body was now transforming into the test tube for the child mixing-up inside her womb.

"Jackie, baby," May called. "Come back to me." "In a second, May, I'm watching the sun set."

May hoisted herself up, her slender legs

quaking, the muscles around her hips and knees tired and torn. Imprints of green grass blades tattooed her back. They would last there forever, until the day she died. *Disappointment in Jack must be kept a secret. There is no need to offend his pride or perceived skills*, May thought. Perhaps if she had felt writhing ecstasy from the buzzing connection of organs she would not have cared how long Jack had lasted, or how inconsiderate to her body he had been. But there was no need, nor time to give into this overwhelming thought.

"Hi, honey," her hair fell over Jack's shoulders. The youth of America stood naked underneath the sky. "It sure is beautiful, ain't it?"

"It sure is, May, it sure is. Hey, May, hand me my clothes?"

"Sure." May went back to the willow and took Jack's clothes from the crevice in the trunk. She lifted them to her nose and nestled her face in his shirt. It smelled of expensive sweetness, of the sharp floral perfume his controlling mother wore.

May inhaled deeply again. The smell brought her back to the classroom. The wood

"She was golden, she was May."

beam ceiling; the chalk grey-green of the front wall; the tidy pine floors and the dusty atmosphere; the windows large and open, but old and squeaky; the sound of students' pencils grinding loudly and slowly inside the metal sharpener.

"So, you think you're smarter than me?" Jack asked at May's locker.

"Perhaps I do."

"Perhaps you should teach me."

"You should teach yourself," May turned to leave but Jack crossed in front of her blocking the exit.

"Excuse me, I need to get home," she said.

"You ain't got no home."

"Yes, I do. Now let me go."

"Aw, c'mon, May, I'm flunkin'!"

"You should have thought of that before you decided to be so stupid, Jack."

"I never thought of you as mean, May," the words stung her.

"I'm sorry," May tightened her grip on the heavy English books. "I shouldn't have said that."

"No, you shouldn't have," and then he smiled. She suddenly became incredibly self-conscious of her hands, her fingernails, that had been dirtied by work in the school garden. "Why are you lookin' down, May? You should look at a person when they're speakin' to ya." Jack looked her over and saw her hands. "I like a girl who ain't 'fraid of workin' with her hands. A little dirt can do her good. Wouldn't you say?"

"Yes, I guess," May squeaked.

"You guess? That's the first time I've heard you guess." May was uncomfortable and flushed with infatuation. She had been knocked off her wit by his smile. Was Jack that handsome and charming that her senses melted in an instant? With a sigh, May agreed to tutor him.

"Great! So when are we going to study?"

"Listen, Jack," May spoke to him closely and sternly. "I intend to tutor you and nothin' else, you understand? I don't have time to deal with pokes and prods at my lifestyle, or my dress, nor can I afford to be taken advantage of to write your papers. I'm here to show you how to do that stuff."

"Oh, yes, Miss May."

"And another thing," May put her books on the ground and held out her hands. "As payment of me tutoring you, because you will be eatin' up my time, you're gonna work in the garden with me and get your hands this dirty. I don't mean thirty minutes either. I know you can build, I've seen your work from woodshop. We really need a new tool shed and a fruit and veggie stand to raise money for next year. You think you can do that?"

"I suppose I can."

"You suppose or know?"

"I know."

"Good. First lesson, always know what you intend to say if you're goin' to say it."

"Understood, Miss May."

"And there's no need to call me Miss May. I'm just your tutor, not your kindergarten teacher."

"Yes, May," Jack stood there smirking. "I appreciate your services."

"So," May cleared her throat, picked her books up

from the floor and returned to a natural distance. "When and where should I meet you for our first session?"

"I suppose tomorrow."

"Where?"

"We could use the empty classroom?"

"I can't study in the classroom. What about your house?"

"Um," Jack scrunched up his face. "I don't think that's such a great idea."

"Why not?"

"My parents...you're..."

"Do they not allow girls over? I'd be mighty surprised if they didn't."

"Well, no, they do."

"So why can't we study at your house?"

"Why can't we study at *your* house?"

"I'm not bringing you there. You know who my momma is; I don't want you to have to deal with that."

"My parents know who your momma is too."

"Is that why I can't study at your house?"

"Kinda."

"Kinda, or yes?"

"Yes. That would be a yes." May scowled at the truth. Jack could see that May was upset by the situation, more so that there was not a place study than the insult to her mother. "Listen, May, I'm sorry, but I don't want you to be hurt by —"

"No, it's okay, I'm used to it. This just means we'll have to use the classroom for now."

"Okay. But what about outside?"

"Outside?"

"Yeah, like a picnic. A study picnic, or something?"

"The wind'll blow all the papers around. You know how low the wind blows around here."

"I've never noticed before."

"One day, I'll have you notice."

"Sounds like a plan."

Jack and May went their separate ways for the day. Jack downtown, May taking the back road to her house on Acre Street. The road to her house was unpaved, surrounded by forest and boulders that indicated where the road split the trees like the Red Sea. Her family had lived among the animals in a humble cabin in these woods for generations. Often the foxes would trot alongside May, the bears would pay her no attention, and the deer would gently walk up to her looking for flowers or greens. May's mother

worked closely with these creatures, learning how they healed each other, and applying the techniques to humans; her tactics had been spotted by hunters and camping townsfolk. Everybody knew about May's mother.

The story goes that in May's eight years walking the road she had never noticed the clearing. It was lush with short, trimmed green grass; the flowers bloomed pallets, and the sky was blue and clear. No one could find her here. This was 21 Acre Street. The story also goes that May stepped into the clearing, feeling the wind play along her ankles, and in the center grew the easy-going willow tree. A barn, broken down and abandoned, lay off in the distance. Her father had spoken of this. It was an old folk-tale told at supper: it was a sign of actualization, but an omen of future disruptions. The willow appeared to those who needed hiding and protection. For centuries it had been this way.

May reached the willow, spread back the branches like a curtain, and looked up at its majesty. There was no wind to disrupt her step. That's how the story goes.

The next day, Jack and May met as planned, but instead of the classroom, May took Jack to the willow tree. And there they would study. The study partnership became friendship, and the friendship became secret romance and followed the paths that secret romances usually follow. The pact to be different than their parents, to accept each other for what they were, was made underneath the easy-going willow tree next to the abandoned barn house on 21 Acre Street. It is also said that they had agreed to make-love as a symbol of their taboo intercourses underneath that willow tree.

Though some say May had loved Jack, it was obvious that it, love, was too sophisticated of an idea for Jack to grasp and it would have been unrequited at best. But every night underneath the willow tree, Jack and May loved the art of rebellion. Every hope and desire to escape what they were living, to change their personal world, was traded. Secrets were created, and promises were made. The whispers would turn into laughs, and turn into sadness, and turn into anger. The foundation of their relationship was not built

on love, but on the kindred spirit of the time.

"Do you believe in God, Jack?" May had asked him one night after school.

"Why do you ask that?"

"I'm curious."

"You're always curious. You know I don't like to think about these things."

"You should be more curious. It leads to self-education. Come here," May grabbed Jack's rough, warm hand, and took him from out behind the willow branches. She motioned for Jack to lie on the ground, and did so herself. "Look at the stars, Jack, and tell me there ain't nothin' bigger than yourself out there."

"I see 'em," Jack looked up.

"No, you have to lie down to see them!"

"I can see them fine standin' up!"

"No, you can't. When you lie down the world stretches out. Your brain can focus on the lookin' rather than the standin', or trying to balance yourself."

"I don't want the world to stretch out. I'm fine with it the way it is."

"I know you are. So lying down ain't gonna change a thing. Unless you're chicken."

"I'm no chicken," Jack lied down next to May.

"There."

"Good. See that right there?"

"What?"

"That star, the bright one," May pointed to the sky.

"There's a lot of stars up there, May, I'm not sure which one you're talking about."

"The big, bright one. It's right above the reddish one."

"Oh, okay..." Jack thought he found it.

"You see how it ain't twinkling, and the other stars are?"

"Uh, yeah," Jack desperately tried to find the star that wasn't twinkling.

"Well, that's actually a planet. Planets don't twinkle."

"Oh."

"You don't see it, do you?"

"I don't think I do. But how does this connect to believin' in God, May?"

"I think that God comes from one of those planets."

"You mean God's an alien or somethin'?"

"Even on this earth, if you or I were to travel to France or China, we'd be aliens. Everybody's an alien in one way or another."

"How do you know there are aliens, though? They ain't real."

"There are a lot of things us humans don't really know, Jack. We can assume we know or don't know, but we really don't know. This willow tree could be real, or could not be real; we could both be insane, hallucinating the same thing, or we could be dreaming, in which case, the world of the dream ain't real to nobody but us two. I could tell you that that planet is bare, with nothing but rock, dust and gases, but have you seen it through the eyes of the planet's surroundings? The answer to life could be on that planet waitin' for some folks like us to find it, rescue it, and use it!

Think of it Jack...think of our bodies.

We're just a bunch of machines, like a car, 'cept made of flesh and bone. And who created this car? It ain't no small human, some small speck on this Earth, like Henry Ford. It was some sort of God who made us. And that God is lookin' down at us now. Just lookin', inspectin' us, makin' sure we're using our bodies right. As a whole, I wouldn't say we are...that's why you hear about him bein' so angry in the Bible. He just gets frustrated like anyone else, because we're abusin' the very thing he created! My momma says that the stars hold a lot of secrets about the way people act and how they end up. I'm not quite sure if I believe that, though. The stars ain't ours alone. They're for the universe, for themselves; we ain't tied to a bunch of burning gas that could be dead or alive. I think, if anything, we're determined by the way the earth reacts around us. My momma believes that too. I personally like that theory better. That make sense?"

"I think you're talking crazy talk, May."

"I may be, but at least I'm talkin'. This could be the last night on earth for us and what good would it be to die without having anything great to say?"

"I guess, but you say great things every day. You seem to cover your bases pretty well. You afraid of dyin' without talkin' everyday?"

"No. I'm just afraid of dyin'...especially because I don't believe in God myself. I wish I did, but I can't seem to get there. I can't seem to let myself go. So even though I think God comes from those stars...I just don't know it, and therefore I don't believe it." There was a pause. The crickets chirped melodiously in their monotone. May was hoping Jack would not think her a frightened, little girl. She turned on her side to face him, her

head propped up by her arm. The blood rushed to her side, making her warm and dizzy.

"Is that the planet right there?" Jack lifted his arm to where the planet actually was.

"Yes," May looked to the sky again, and once May had acknowledged Jack's correctness, he let his arm flop down on his chest. "Jack, I don't want you to think I live my life in fear of the apocalypse."

There was another wordless moment between them.

"It's okay. I'm afraid of dyin' too, May."

"Really?"

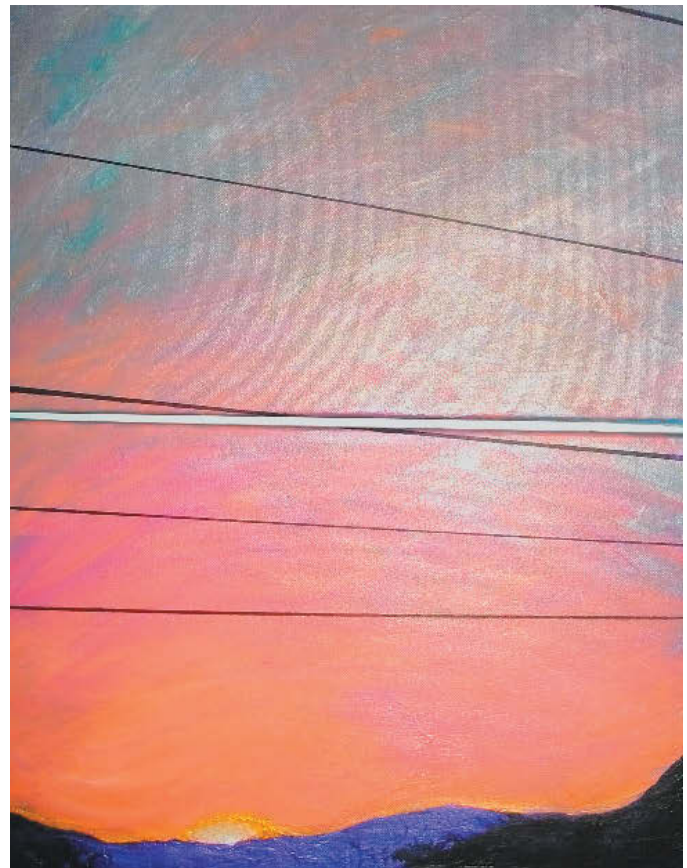
"Yeah," Jack stood up. "My back is startin' to hurt on that ground. I think I was on a rock or something—"

"Why are you afraid of dyin', Jack?" May sat up and turned to him. Jack was twirling one of the willow branches in his fingers. He didn't look at her.

"Oh, I dunno..."

"You have to know if you said it."

END OF EXCERPT.



Food *for* Thought

Identity

Tazmin Uddin

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself
in the service of others."

Mahatma Gandhi

"Keep away from people who try to belittle your
ambitions. Small people always do that, but the
really great make you feel that you, too, can be-
come great."

Mark Twain

"Knowing others is intelligence; knowing
yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is
strength; mastering yourself is true power. If you
realize that you have enough, you are truly rich."

Lao Tzu

"He who experiences the unity of life sees his
own Self in all beings, and all beings in his own
Self."

Buddha

"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about
creating yourself."

George Bernard Shaw

"Your heart is the size of an ocean. Go find
yourself in its hidden depths!"

Rumi

"An unexamined life is not worth living."

Socrates

WHO IS THE PERSON OF INTEREST?

"Don't be afraid – I can still portray
What we resemble now.
You are a ghost – or a man passing
through,
And for some reason I cherish your
shade."

Anna Akhmatova, 1962

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Page 6, *Rest*

Page 8, *Buzzing*

Page 14, *The Impact of Man*

Back cover, *Landscape*

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